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Week of
September 16, 1940

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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† *"Jupiter Laughs" opened last Monday, September 9th, at the Biltmore Theatre. Newspaper Critics' reviews in this issue.*

† *"Sim Sala Bim" opened last Monday, September 9th, at the Morosco Theatre. Newspaper Critics' reviews in this issue.*

† *"Hold On to Your Hats" opened last Wednesday, September 11th, at the Shubert Theatre. Newspaper Critics' reviews in this issue.*

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

New York Sun	**New York Times**
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New York Herald Tribune	**New York World-Telegram**

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"Hold On to Your Hats"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *September 12, 1940*

Hold On to Your Hats Has Old-Time Jolson Flavor

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

AL JOLSON returned to Broadway last night in his first stage production in 10 long years and received one of the warmest, most boisterous welcomes of his career. The inspiration of facing a live New York audience was so pronounced, in fact, that the grand old troubadour sat up half the night entertaining the audience with his old-time melodies, giving them good measure for the $8.80 they had spent for opening-night seats at the Shubert Theater.

The tribute, I am constrained to say, was rather to Mr. Jolson than to the show, which is called Hold On to Your Hats and which has something or other to do with the experiences of a radio cowboy who, by error, finds himself in real bandit territory. But under the circumstances of Mr. Jolson's return from his long stretch in Hollywood perhaps the book doesn't matter. The important thing is that Mr. Jolson is home again.

It is an old-fashioned musical comedy, embellished with some of Raoul Pene DuBois' most lavish mountings and costumes and by a set of chorus girls who seem to have stepped directly out of some agency for models. It boasts some excellent ensemble dances that were staged by George Hale in a rapid, modern tempo and music ranging from mediocre to excellent. It is short only on comedy, unless you happen to be one to whom Miss Martha Raye's vigorous brand of clowning appeals. Miss Raye, as you probably know, is not the subtle type.

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Mr. Jolson's entrance, as the timid lone rider of the radio, is marked by a monologue of the rare old variety that has long since, unhappily, departed from vaudeville. It is conversational, colloquial and topical, and the audience loves it. This is followed by a radio sketch that has been considerably smartened up and given more briskness than when I saw it two weeks ago in Philadelphia. The sketch serves to establish the character of the lone rider, who faints whenever a gun goes off.

Succeeding scenes carry the lone rider to the Far West, where, by dint of fortuitous mistakes, he succeeds in overpowering the Red Terror of the Plains, a Mexican bandit, and all is well. By this time it is past 11:30, and Mr. Jolson begins singing the old favorites—April Showers, Sonny Boy, Swanee and the rest. As he observes, the Stork Club will probably still be open when the show breaks, so why not sit around a while.

A team of three is responsible for the book, which is credited to the joint efforts of Guy Bolton, Matt Brooks and Eddie Davis and which must have been written by Hollywood conference methods. E. Y. Harburg did the lyrics, which are nothing startling, and Burton Lane wrote the music.

There is considerable flavor of the old-time Jolson in his first song, Walkin' Along Mindin' My Business, and it has the definite swing and lilting melody that was so characteristic of the songs that made him famous. The best ballad, to my mind, is The World Is in My Arms, which was gracefully sung by Jack Whiting and Eunice Healey. The song with the greatest dance potential is There's a Great Day Coming, Manana, which serves as the first-act finale.

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The most spectacular scene is at the beginning of the second act, in which Mr. DuBois, turned loose in a Mexican setting, produced some gorgeous color effects, first with lavish use of red and white and, later, of the black and white in which he works so effectively.

Hollywood seems not to have changed Al Jolson. Certainly he has not become slothful or lazy. His feet travel as rapidly and as lightly as ever. He still throws his entire frame into every song he sings, shaking the words out of him in paroxysms of energy as in the old days, and he still projects his personality to the top row of the galleries.

Those who assist most effectively in keeping the show lively are, in addition to Mr. Whiting and Miss Healey (who has, by the way, one show-stopping dance), are Bert Gordon, the mad Russian; Arnold Moss as the bandit, Russ Brown as a radio manager, Gil Lamb, eccentric dancer.

It is good to have Al Jolson back. Broadway is beginning to look like Broadway again.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *September 12, 1940*

'Hold On to Your Hats' Brings Al Jolson Back to Broadway After an Absence of Nine Years

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IT'S all right folks. "Hold On to Your Hats" has arrived at the Shubert, where it opened last evening, and the musical comedy season has begun with enormous gusto. For this is the show that is bringing Al Jolson back to Broadway after an absence of nine years. If you think you have lost some of the old fondness for him during the interim, prepare for a pleasant surprise. He is a little older now; his hair is a little thinner. But none of the warmth has gone out of his singing, and none of the gleam has departed from his story-telling. By great good fortune he is also appearing in one of the funniest musical plays that have stumbled on to Broadway for years. Hold your sides as tightly as the title directs you to hold your hat.

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Guy Bolton, Matt Brooks and Eddie Davis (for authors are now coming in triplicate) have come out of the library, with a mad book about a radio cowboy who finds himself involved in some desperate doings on a dude-ranch in the West. Burton Lane has written a frenzied score for it; E. Y. Harburg has put together some comic lyrics. Shooting the works in honor of reunion, Mr. Jolson and his associates have populated it with about the best all-around cast of the last five-year period. Martha Raye is a barrel of fun. Bert Gordon is hilarious as an Indian with an East Side accent. Any number of excellent dancers whirl through it. The chorus is extraordinarily attractive. Squandering all the paint in sight, Raoul Pene Du Bois has designed a light-footed, beautiful production. And Edgar MacGregor, standing in the director's box, has pulled all the details together and turned out a boisterous, fast musical show without a dull spot in it.

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As a matter of fact, the combination of Al Jolson and Martha Raye is just about perfect. He is the magnetic minstrel who has a way with a song and the power to capture an audience instantly. She is a fantastic cut-up with a great capacity for personal enjoyment. Two things stopped the show last evening. One was a slip of the tongue. In the frenzy of the moment Miss Raye found herself complimenting Al for "saving the Jews" instead of "the jewels," which was the word the book called for, and the confusion that resulted turned into comic hysteria. The other was "Down on the Dude Ranch" as sung by Al, Miss Raye and Bert Gordon. A burlesque ballad with some wonderful satiric lines, it is sung with great relish by an inspired trio of comedians, and might have gone on for a half hour if the verses had held out.

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There are plenty of rousing songs for singing and dancing. "Don't Let It Get You Down" takes care of the sentiment. "There's a Great Day Coming, Manana" works revelry up to the dancing point. After the critics had departed, Mr. Jolson took some of his old songs out of his memory book. If there were any justice in a newspaper column, something handsome ought to be said for Eunice Healey, who is lovely; for George Church, who dances beautifully in the Mexican styles; for Gil Lamb, who is a working hoofer, and all the rest. For this is a capital musical show that has restored Al Jolson to his former glory and recovered some of the old abandon of fun and skylarking in the theatre.

"Hold On to Your Hats"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *September 12, 1940*

'Hold On to Your Hats,' With Al Jolson, Opens at the Shubert

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

AL JOLSON came back last evening and sang some of his old songs and some new ones for the folks. The ten years he has been away haven't changed him much. He is still funny and rhythmic and unabashedly sentimental by turns, his lips still quiver with emotion and there is a special vitality in everything he does. He is still, in his own way, pretty grand. His show, which is called "Hold On to Your Hats," is all right, too.

It gives Mr. Jolson range, does "Hold On to Your Hats," which may be seen at the Shubert. In the genial palaver of its plot it turns him from radio singer into reluctant broncobuster, from broncobuster into bullfighter, from bullfighter into an improbable and swaying senorita. He is also a fruit peddler in a wig and he conquers the villain and wins the girl. Mr. Jolson certainly gets around in "Hold On to Your Hats." So does the plot, without ever asking to be taken seriously—without ever dreaming that it will be.

It is probably enough to know about the plot that in it Mr. Jolson is, basically, the Lone Rider of the radio, in which capacity he carols "hi-yo, Goldie" and collapses in terror at explosive sound effects. But out in Arizona they believe his every word and the strange denizens of a dude ranch persuade him to come out and catch a bandit—a mighty mean Mexican bandit. After tribulations, and comically enough, Mr. Jolson succeeds. That's enough about the plot, probably. Its gyrations give Raoul Pene Du Bois opportunity for colorful sets and to dress the pretty girls in fabrics snipped judiciously from the rainbow.

Mr. Jolson makes his own opportunities in his jovial fashion. With Martha Raye of the puckered face and the hearty comedy, he sings about how things are "Down on the Dude Ranch," while Bert Gordon, who has incredible ears and other appurtenances of comedy, assists. He sings "There's a Great Day Coming, Manana" and, again with Miss Raye, "Would You Be So Kindly." All of these are very nice, although perhaps none so essentially Jolson songs as those he sings, by request, along toward midnight when he professes to think the critics have gone home. You don't get rid of critics that easily, Mr. Jolson, when there's fun going.

There's fun going all the time, or most of it, in "Hold On to Your Hats." It may not be a show you will remember to your dying day, but it is big and bright and gay, with pleasant music by Burton Lane and amiable lyrics by E. Y. Harburg and a comfortable book. It has also Jack Whiting and the alarmingly limber Gil Lamb and fine, fresh, new-season girls. But best and most of all it has Mr. Jolson, back from limbo.

Everybody was glad to see him last evening and whistled and cheered. Mr. Jolson, beamingly, whistled back, and took the audience into his confidence. Everything was relaxed and cheerful—Mr. Jolson, "Hold On to Your Hats" and even, for all its bibs and tuckers, the audience.

'HOLD ON TO YOUR HATS'

A musical comedy in two acts; lyrics by E. Y. Harburg; music by Burton Lane; book by Guy Bolton, Matt Brooks and Eddie Davis; costumes and scenery by Raoul Pene Du Bois; book staged by Edgar MacGregor, dances by Catherine Littlefield; presented at the Shubert Theater on September 11, 1940, by Al Jolson and George Hale. The cast:

Sierra	Margaret Irving
"Slim"	Gil Lamb
"Lon"	George Church
Pete	Jack Whiting
Mamie	Martha Raye
1st Dudette	"Jinx" Falkenburg
2nd Dudette	Joyce Matthews
3rd Dudette	Thea Pinto
Sheriff	Lew Eckles
Fernando	Arnold Moss
Lone Rider	Al Jolson
Radio Announcer	John Randolph
"Shep" Martin	Joe Stoner
"Old Man" Hawkins	Marty Drake
"Concho"	Bert Gordon (The Mad Russian)
Sound Effects	George Maran
"Dinky"	Russ Brown
Shirley	Eunice Healey
Luis	Sid Cassel
Pedro	Will Kuluva
Rita	"Jinx" Falkenburg
The Tanner Sisters	"Mickey" Tanner Betty Tanner Martha Tanner
The Radio Aces	Marty Drake Lou Stoner Joe Stoner

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *September 12, 1940*

Al Jolson Returns in "Hold On to Your Hats"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT TOOK Al Jolson "in person" to remind some of us last night of what an extraordinary entertainer he really is. His throaty hymns to Mammy may in memory have become easily resisted. But Mr. Jolson in person and in action is quite a different proposition.

The people who can match his personality in our theatre are rare. He is at once host and performer, minstrel and crooner, hero and autobiographer. Even if Martha Raye, that uproariously rowdy mammal with the trenchlike mouth, and Jack Whiting, who is Ponce de Leon's rival, and Bert Gordon, "The Mad Russian" of radio fame, with his schooner ears, and many chorus girls, and something of a book were not on hand at the Shubert, "Hold On to Your Hats" would still be a satisfactory show in Al Jolson's own rights.

From the moment of his first entrance, when he settles down on a chair centre-stage to talk directly to the audience, he establishes his preeminence and banishes formality. He is the perfect master of ceremonies not only for the musical in which he is appearing but for himself. As a confidence man to Jolson, he spills his public secrets with a breezy surety belonging to a vanished race of vaudevillians.

His eyes shine like two black moons when a gag is coming or an innuendo stands in need of illumination. His lips and voice tremble as readily on sentimental cues as if they were dancers going through a well-known routine. Whether he is prattling about his sonny boy, his father, his hotel, the races, Mr. Willkie or Mr. Roosevelt, Mr. Jolson's first and last concern is keeping his audience with him. And with him it is.

He can get laughs with the ease with which a magician extracts rabbits from an empty hat. Stir memories, too. And warm the heart. The book to "Hold On to Your Hats" is an interruption Mr. Jolson does not take too seriously. It has to do with a gun-shy crooner, known as "The Lone Rider," who finds himself in the real cowboy west compelled to capture a genuine bandit. Thereafter this saga comes to life in Mexico for no good reason in the second half, when the same crooner must once again confront the same bandit, who, after being bombed, is miraculously resurrected for plot purposes.

Mr. Jolson at the Bat

The book of "Hold On to Your Hats," though ailing and routine, passes the time pleasantly enough at moments. Whenever it gets too much in the way, Mr. Jolson wisely puts it behind him as the childish thing most musical comedy books are anyway. Miss Raye takes knowing. At the outset she seemed lost last night. But after she and Mr. Jolson had had their fun, and given as much, with a dialogic slip good enough to be kept in, if indeed it is not already well-preserved, Miss Raye increased in comicality until her goofy abandon won her many royal, and deserved, salutes of laughter. As a radio Indian Mr. Gordon of the wind-swept ears also grew in humor as one grew accustomed to him.

The evening, however, is Mr. Jolson's, as everyone knew and hoped it would be. And a very agreeable, generous evening he makes of it, too. At about eleven-ten, he happily discarded the book and started singing some of the songs he has made famous. At this moment, and for many moments thereafter, "Hold On to Your Hats" ceases to be merely entertaining and becomes downright exciting, in the pleasantest sentimental way. Last night "April Showers," "Swannee," "You Made Me Love You," and "Sonny Boy" were some of the old songs Mr. Jolson revived. He sang them as only he can sing them, with an unction and a surety that are hard to match. He sang them as freshly as if he had never sung them before. But for those of us who knew better that was part of our joy. We liked having the embers blown.

Here, as elsewhere during the proceedings, Mr. Jolson made us realise that he has been absent from Broadway for much too long a time for everyone's comfort. It is good to have him back.

"Hold On to Your Hats"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *September 12, 1940*

"Hold On to Your Hats" Brings Al Jolson Back to Broadway

"Hold On to Your Hats," musical revue with book by Guy Bolton, Matt Brooks and Eddie Davis, lyrics by E. Y. Harburg and music by Burton Lane. Produced by Al Jolson and George Hale at the Shubert Theatre, New York, Sept. 11, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE welcome for Al Jolson, who returned to a Broadway stage last night for the first time in nigh onto ten years, may not have exceeded that singing comedian's expectations, but he should have found it satisfying.

With confidence in their loyalty, and a co-producer's natural interest in the box-office, Mr. Jolson made it possible for the Jolsonites of other years to prove their liking for him by depositing $8.80 a ticket for the better seats at the Shubert box office.

His admirers met the challenge with enthusiasm. Not only was the theatre filled, but there was a circle of standees at the orchestra rail at least three-deep at its points of vantage.

The ten years have not changed Mr. Jolson greatly. Added a certain roundness to his features, it may be, but taken nothing from the mellowness of his voice nor the joy with which he projects a tune, or tells a suggestive story.

At the end of the evening he was to sing a certain number of the remembered Jolson songs—such as "April Showers," "Sonny Boy" and if demanded, the long popular "Mammy."

Pleasant Memories

Your correspondent was called away before the recital started, but a report by phone indicates that if he had been of a mind to fill all the requests shouted at him he could still have been at that pleasant occupation.

"Hold On to Your Hats" is quite in the Jolson tradition, being a collection of burlesque gags, brightly staged ensemble numbers, pleasant tunes and skillful dances.

There isn't much that can be done with that particular pattern that has not been done before. The trick is to do it well enough to minimize if not to hide its obviousness.

In this instance there is a fleeting bit of inspiration in the comedian's pretending to be the widely popular Lone Ranger of the air waves. Comes a situation in which the candy cowboys of a dude ranch come East to engage the Lone Ranger to do a bit of bandit hunting for them.

The satire quickly loses point, however, and thereafter the entertainment is a matter of music cues and dancing interludes.

Martha's Hit

The contributors make the show. Naturally Mr. Jolson is its chief attraction. Martha Raye, however, is practically a co-star, or was last night. The lady of the wide open countenance and the resilient nature proved a great help, stopped the show on occasion and started it all over again during the Jolson testimonial. Her clowning suggests a natural spontaneity, she is inventive and good fun.

Singing "Down On the Dude Ranch" with Mr. Jolson and another gift of the air, one Bert Gordon, who used to double as the Mad Russian of Eddie Cantor's program, Miss Raye is what could rightly be termed a scream.

Mr. Gordon, a Willie Howard type, also had his moments. Jack Whiting and Eunice Healey take care of the duets, "The World Is in My Arms" being their leading bid.

There is a harmonizing trio of Tanner girls that has a supreme advantage in looks over most similar trios, and another three, including two Stoner boys and Marty Drake, who also sing well.

Until the competition stiffens, "Hold On to Your Hats" adds a spicy seasoning of personalities to the current list of musical shows.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *September 12, 1940*

First Minstrel

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

SINCE this is evidently to be a theatrical season devoted chiefly to musical shows, it is only fitting that Al Jolson, the First Minstrel, should start the procession.

It has been ten years since Mr. Jolson was last with us, ten years in which he has been wasting his time in various eccentric activities, and it is a pleasure to welcome him back where he belongs. For there is no getting around it: Al Jolson remains, after all of these seasons, a master showman and a brilliant entertainer who can put over a song in incomparable fashion and manages to give any show in which he appears an amiably informal atmosphere that is of vast help to the high spirits of the occasion. He can make you feel you are participating in a pleasant party; and that is a quality difficult to capture and decidedly worth capturing.

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For the purposes of the record, it must be put down that the name of the new Jolson show is "Hold On to Your Hats" and that it is about a timorous radio cowboy who is forced to go West and pursue a Mexican bad man. All of this, however, is fortunately of little importance. The important thing is that Mr. Jolson is the Jolson of old and that his vehicle gives him a proper chance to demonstrate his gift for showmanship. He never does get around to putting on blackface and it isn't until the finale that he sings all of his classic songs, but even when putting over the new numbers that E. Y. Harburg and Burton Lane have written for him or chatting with the audience or pretending to ad lib with the members of his supporting cast or carrying on what there is of a plot, he does it with such ease and deft assurance and knowledge of all the tricks of his business that he is invariably a comfort. As a matter of fact, I think he has even mellowed a bit since he was here last.

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The most prominent member of the supporting cast is Miss Martha Raye, late of the cinema. In the movies Miss Raye always seemed to me one of the most distressing comediennes in the world, and I will not go so far as to say that the sight of her on the stage has made me change my opinion completely. I can say, however, that she is a willing and strenuous worker, that she is about three hundred times better on the stage than she was on the screen and that she certainly adds to the zest of "Hold On to Your Hats." Bert Gordon, of radio and vaudeville, is genuinely funny as a Hebraic Indian after the first few minutes, while Miss Eunice Healey, as the ingenue; the inevitable Jack Whiting as the inevitable juvenile; Arnold Moss—who was so good last season in "The Fifth Column"—as the villain, and Russ Brown as the straight man are of help, while a comic dance by one Gil Lamb has its points. A very beautiful showgirl with the enigmatic name of Jinx Falkenburg adds greatly to the decorative qualities of the show.

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The Harburg-Lane score is lively and tuneful in a reasonably modest way. There is a good romantic song in "The World Is in My Arms," a couple of good Jolson songs in "Walkin' Along Mindin' My Business" and "There's a Great Day Coming, Manana," and a good comic song in "Down on the Dude Ranch"—which, incidentally, Mr. Jolson, Miss Raye and Mr. Gordon put over admirably. The dances are pleasant and Raoul Pene Du Bois's sets and costumes are correctly colorful. To get back to the book, it is what I suppose I would call, if I knew exactly what the slang term meant, "corny," but, fortunately, it doesn't get in the way and it does supply the framework for some amusing comedy of a happily reminiscent vaudeville quality. All of this, however, is merely in passing. What we all want to know is that Mr. Jolson is back on Broadway again in characteristic form, which, in these dire times, is very good news, indeed.

"Jupiter Laughs"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *September 10, 1940*

'Jupiter Laughs,' an A. J. Cronin Drama, Is Offered at the Biltmore

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

DR. A. J. CRONIN has firmly established himself as an authority on the problems which from time to time confront the medical profession, particularly in England, and it would be a grievous impertinence for a layman to question his gloomy facts. This department, therefore, is properly convinced that gruff young scientists have fully as hard a time as has the hero of "Jupiter Laughs," a play by Dr. Cronin which opened last evening at the Biltmore. This department wishes it could care more.

There is little lacking in "Jupiter Laughs" except possibly skill in telling a story for the stage. Certainly mighty hard things happen to young Dr. Paul Venner, who had an unhappy boyhood and a dire early middle age. He achieved, to be sure, one of those revolutionary, faintly mythical, curative discoveries of which fictional medical practice is so full. But it did him little good. The proprietor of the British nerve sanatorium where Dr. Venner worked was a pompous churl and the proprietor's wife was a troublesome siren. The matron was as forbidding as if she had just stepped from the scene of a psychological thriller, as I rather suspect she had. Dr. Venner's lovely bethrothed disturbed him a little by talking religion, but was captured and destroyed at the end of the second act in the meshes of an intricate plot. Those who beset pure science in Dr. Venner's worthy person even tried to burn the records of his discovery.

All this, and the good deal more which has been heaped in, should make a full play. But "Jupiter Laughs" is never a full play. It is only a cluttered one. The plot rolls this way and that and the author touches on several themes, one or two of importance. There is, for example, a rather touching consideration of religion at the very end. The characters, with some striking exceptions, are reasonable and convincing, and one would like to care about their fates. I am mildly sorry to report that this one couldn't.

Essentially, "Jupiter Laughs" is concocted drama, flagrantly devised in plot and always sounding like something which has simply been made up for the theater and not made up particularly well. Reginald Denham's direction is desultory and one or two of the performances are a little odd. Miss Jessica Tandy's is not odd at all, but straight-forward and appealing, and Alexander Knox, as the abused physician, has the grace to believe his role and the skill to act it. Reginald Mason plays pleasantly, as he always does, and Miss Edith Meiser is so sinister that one shudders when she pours tea. But even after they have done their best, the play remains trivial.

'JUPITER LAUGHS'

A play in three acts by Dr. A. J. Cronin; staged by Reginald Denham; designed by Raymond Sovey; presented on September 9, 1940, at the Biltmore Theater under the management of Bernard Klawans. The cast:

Dr. Richard Drewett....Reginald Mason
Dr. George Thorogood....Carl Harbord
Dr. Paul Venner.....Alexander Knox
Matron Fanny Leeming....Edith Meiser
Dr. Edgar Bragg.....Philip Tonge
Dr. Mary Murray.....Jessica Tandy
Jennie.....Mary Orr
Gladys Bragg.....Nancy Sheridan
Albert Chivers.....Charles Jordan
Martha Foster.....Esther Mitchell

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *September 10, 1940*

Jupiter Laughs Opens at Biltmore Theater

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IT WILL NOT be news to those familiar with plays dealing with the medical profession that the lot of the pioneer doctor is not a happy one. His experimental work is hampered by jealousies of less brilliant physicians and obstructed by his conservative colleagues. He is misundertood by the public he is trying to help, and often he is torn between duty and love, as is the case in Dr. A. J. Cronin's new play, Jupiter Laughs, which had its premiere last night at the Biltmore Theater.

Dr. Cronin clings closely to the well-worn pattern, and the entire play, it seemed to me, was a Hollywood cliche dragged out into three long and uninspiring acts and chiefly marked by the surprising number of disagreeable characters the author succeeds in putting on the stage at one time.

Perhaps one of the reasons for my keen disappointment in the play is that, despite a wholly admirable performance by Alexander Knox, there is altogether too little in the character of the hero, one Dr. Venner, to make him a sympathetic or appealing figure. Particularly in the earlier scenes his cynical (and somewhat adolescent) flippancy is not an endearing quality however one may realize the nobility of his endeavors in the line of medical research.

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Dr. Cronin places the scene of Jupiter Laughs in a private sanatorium in England where Dr. Venner, against great odds, is attempting to find a compound that will revivify dead nerves. In the picture of this institution as drawn by Dr. Cronin there is perhaps reason for the young scientist's cynicism. The sanatorium is operated by a man who knows more about publicity than medicine. The resident physicians, other than the hero, are a superannuated doctor who has lost all ambition and an impossible young bounder who owes his position to the fact that he is a nephew of the proprietor. Of the three important women in the play, one is the loose-moraled wife of the head doctor, who has already seduced the young scientist before the curtain rises; the second is a disagreeable female who has risen from kitchen drudgery to a position of domestic despotism as the matron, and the third is a nice young medical student with whom the hero naturally falls in love.

This collection of assorted jealousies and hatreds operates in the end to destroy the scientist's laboratory, to kill the nice young student and to drive the scientist into exile in China.

It was a matter of regret that Dr. Cronin had to sacrifice the girl, particularly since the part was taken by Miss Jessica Tandy, who gave the impression of being exactly the kind of girl the author intended—sweet, efficient, kind, understanding and co-operative.

Alexander Knox, as I said above, was wholly admirable, and it is a pity that the author in elaborating the character of Dr. Venner too strongly emphasized the unpleasant qualities at the expense of his basic soundness.

The company was for the most part English, and the play was directed along conventional British lines by Reginald Denham. And the next time a character in a British play, coming late for breakfast or lunch or tea, strolls to the sideboard, removes the silver cover from a platter, sniffs at the sausages and turns up his nose, I shall stalk out of the playhouse and go home. What is this strange affinity between British drama and the dining table?

In every British play, too, some law requires the presence of a quizzical old codger eternally smoking a pipe and eternally reading a newspaper, and ceasing neither his smoking nor his reading whilst he delivers benevolent homilies to the younger generation. Such a part inevitably calls for Reginald Mason, and there he was last night doing a thorough job as usual.

Carl Harbord made the character of the bounder quite as detestable as Dr. Cronin conceived it, and Edith Meiser, who seems to have patterned her performances on that of Flora Robson in Ladies in Retirement, tried hard to make the matron a sinister figure. In two small scenes Esther Mitchell gave a thorough performance of a cockney character.

But not even the realistic explosion of the laboratory, as a second-act climax, stirs Jupiter Laughs out of its placid and unexciting groove.

"Jupiter Laughs"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *September 10, 1940*

"Jupiter Laughs" Staged at the Biltmore

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH A. J. Cronin is a doctor who has achieved success as a novelist, he cannot claim as yet to have hung out his shingle as a dramatist. "Jupiter Laughs" makes this disconcertingly clear at the Biltmore. It is a sorry and confused play; as earnest as it is inept.

The good doctor's stage-side manner is disappointing. His first drama lacks the sympathetic qualities which distinguished even the celluloid retelling of "The Citadel". The doctor's touch is heavy. His instruments seem rusty. His pills prove to be sedatives. His bag is jammed with old tricks. He not only fails to explain his visit but loses his patient almost as soon as his treatment begins.

Quick, Watson

Dr. Cronin's unchanging scene in "Jupiter Laughs" is the common room of a nerve sanatorium in England. In this cheerless institution, bulging with unattractive attendants, a young scientist makes a great discovery against enormous odds. Meanwhile the evangelical lady doctor with whom he has fallen in love has been killed in an explosion in his laboratory while trying to save the young scientist's papers from his former mistress, the superintendent's wife. Thereupon the young scientists ends up by determining to go to China in his dead fiancee's place.

If, even as so over-simplified, Dr. Cronin's plot seems mystifying in its intricacy, permit me to assure you that it is infinitely more intricate as it has left the good doctor's hands. At the Biltmore, "Jupiter Laughs" is a veritable ambulance-full of wounded plots and subplots, of ailing ideas, of bruised passions, and expiring wheezes, every one of which stands in desperate need of first-aid treatment.

Although the good doctor threatens to be dealing with a romantic statement of science versus religion, his play in this, and in most other respects, is a series of broken promises. It is ponderously staged and unevenly acted. Reginald Mason is pleasant enough as a gruff old doctor. Edith Meiser works industriously as the matron at being a hospital version of Mrs. Danvers. Esther Mitchell does an excellent bit in her first scene as worried poor woman. Alexander Knox plays the young scientist with much earnest intensity. And Jessica Tandy brings genuine quality to her medicated Major Barbara. But the evening is far from being satisfactory hokum.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *September 10, 1940*

"Jupiter Laughs" at Biltmore

"Jupiter Laughs," drama by Dr. A. J. Cronin. Produced under the direction of Bernard Klawans at the Biltmore Theatre, New York, Sept. 9, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

DR. A. J. CRONIN of London, an observing medic who takes as easily if not as felicitously to writing as did his one-time fellow practitioner, Somerset Maugham, had the fun of tossing the first new play into the New York theatre season of 1940-41 last night at the Biltmore Theatre.

This is a drama called "Jupiter Laughs." It has to do with the loves and hates of a group of doctors on the staff of a sanatorium for the treatment of neurotics located somewhere in London. (It may have been bombed out of existence last night for all we know).

It is a slightly confused drama of familiar theatre conflicts. Science and religion, sacred and profane love, a materialistic and a non-materialistic view of the value of human life—all these come into the discussion.

None of the conflicts seemed particularly well resolved in the end. The brilliant young scientist who had found his true love in a lady medic, come to live and work in Hopewell Towers, had suffered the loss of his formulae and his convictions and had left for China with a prayer book.

The heroine had given her life for a love that had disappointed her and Hopewell Towers had been partly wrecked by a laboratory explosion.

Good Acting

The virtues of "Jupiter Laughs" are found in the even competence of its actors. Through them Reginald Denham, who did the staging, is able to develop at least some slight story-telling value.

No one, for example, can follow the love fortunes of the appealing Jessica Tandy without some little emotional response.

A competent leading man, Alexander Knox, little known to Broadway, makes the young scientist convincingly miserable. Edith Meiser plays an obviously neurotic matron with such delight as comes to lady villainesses and Nancy Sheridan represents man's love with an understanding gained from much stage experience.

Reginald Mason, Philip Tonge, Esther Mitchell, and several others are helpful, and a setting by Raymond Sovey served admirably.

The town is short of drama. Dr. Cronin's "Jupiter Laughs" should therefore enjoy a few early-season weeks. By the time it finds its way to Hollywood and back by way of the screen it will doubtless have enough Spitfires and Stukas flying through it and over it to give it an entirely new and effective war-time background.

The doctor, incidentally, also wrote that crusading novel, "The Citadel," which did quite well by him. He and Mrs. Cronin have been visiting in Canada and America for several months.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *September 10, 1940*

Jupiter Sleeps

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

DR. CRONIN, one of the several hundred thousand literary medicos still at large, gives us a play about the medical profession and leaves the new dramatic season just about where he found it. As nearly as I could discover, he is writing in "Jupiter Laughs" about the struggle between the idealist and the materialist, which is hardly a novel topic even in the drama. Yet the frank familiarity of the subject matter could hardly lead you to anticipate that his play would be so dull and commonplace and entirely without freshness or originality in thought, emotion and expression. Written entirely with the most routine of theatrical and literary stencils, "Jupiter Laughs" wastes the talent of such a good actress as Miss Jessica Tandy and provides so feeble an evening in the theater that the most enthusiastic of the Cronin fans can hardly find it exciting or stimulating. So far as I am concerned, it is just Dr. Kildare.

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The good doctor's central character is a bitter and morose physician who has discovered something or other pretty important to medical science, but is interested only in its scientific aspects, not in its potential aid to humanity. The Cronin heroine, on the other hand, has become a doctor because she wants to be a medical missionary in China and help suffering mankind. The materialistic hero is quite scornful to her at first, until Love enters his life, and even then he is skeptical until the girl dies heroically in trying to save him when his enemies are plotting against him. Thereupon he plays the piano feverishly, tells off his discarded and vengeful mistress scornfully, decides with a philosophical doctor that there may be something in this idea of God and dashes off to China to atone for his impolite treatment of his sweetheart's idealism. It was the first time since spring that I wasn't sorry about not getting to China this year.

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There are a lot of other things in the plot, including the love of a spinsterish matron for the fatuous head of the nerve sanatorium, but they are as dull and pointless as the incidents of the main narrative. But even if "Jupiter Laughs" contained any freshness of story, the feeble writing and the complete triviality of its manipulation of ideas and emotions would make it a commonplace drama. Miss Tandy plays with her usual straightforward honesty, and Alexander Knox, who was Friar Laurence in the hapless Olivier-Leigh "Romeo and Juliet," is effective enough as the central character. In addition, Reginald Mason plays a medical veteran who hangs on the outskirts of the plot, and manages it with his usual easy-going competence. But it is all to no avail. "Jupiter Laughs" shows the dramatic season bogged down in mediocrity.

"Jupiter Laughs"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *September 10, 1940*

'Jupiter Laughs' Is First Drama Written by Dr. A. J. Cronin

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ABOUT ten years ago, Dr. A. J. Cronin gave up the practice of medicine in London to write novels. Probably he has not given up anything except a few months to write his first drama, "Jupiter Laughs," which was put on at the Biltmore last evening. But that is no compensation to the audience that sat through the first performance. For Dr. Cronin, author of "Hatter's Castle," "The Citadel" and two or three less famous novels, is all thumbs in the theatre. Taken literally as a narrative, the story is maudlin and the characters are cut out of colored cardboard. If the drama has any interior meaning, it does not penetrate the mechanical performance that Reginald Denham has directed. "Jupiter Laughs" looks like a play and sounds like a play, but never achieves dramatic existence.

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The chief character is a boorish, vile-mannered, agnostic medical scientist who, as every experienced theatregoer knows at once, is on the brink of a momentous scientific discovery. The heroine is an idealistic young physician of charming manners who expects to become a missionary in China. Since they are antipathetic in every respect and since the hero studiously insults the heroine on every occasion, they naturally fall in love. There is something about the theatre that makes this sort of Mumbo-Jumbo inevitable.

Dr. Cronin, who is no slouch, has a lot of story to wrap around his chief characters. It involves a nice little episode in infidelity, a malign hospital matron, the death of a patient who is a victim of experimentation, an explosion in the laboratory and the death—quite noble—of the heroine. But none of the characters has the warmth or spontaneity of a human being, and the story that laboriously ties them together is never more than pedantic. If the agnostic is converted, it is only because Dr. Cronin wills it so. That is the only creative aspect of "Jupiter Laughs," i.e., laughs ironically.

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The performance is uninspired, giving the impression that more of the Warner Brothers' money than heart is in the production. As the saturnine physician, Alexander Knox gives a brilliant performance—clear, sharp, dry, perfectly pointed in every detail. Jessica Tandy, whose luck with parts is running a bad field these days, gives the heroine the benefit of her lucidity of style and personal beauty. Although Edith Meiser is best known in this town for her satiric humor, her portrait of a neurotic matron is about the best thing she has done here.

The rest of the acting is no more than routine, ranging from the competence of Reginald Mason and Nancy Sheridan to the mannered incompetence of Philip Tonge. Nothing in the direction brings any of these individual performances into a dramatic relationship. But Dr. Cronin has been of very little service in that respect. His formulas do not mix in the theatre.

"Sim Sala Bim"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *September 11, 1940*

Dante Comes to Town With His Bag of Tricks

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IT IS so many years since the mighty men of magic, the Herrmanns, Thurston, Houdini, Keller, used to tour the country with their magnificent illusions that an entirely new crop of theatergoers should be ripe for mystification by the man who calls himself Dante, and who has opened up his bag of tricks this week at the Morosco Theater.

I know nothing about Mr. Dante's personal history except that he hinted last night that he had been a youthful admirer and perhaps a pupil of Keller. Keller gave him, he said, the original boxes with which he does the disappearing ring trick—the one where rings taken from ladies of the audience and battered to pieces by the magician's hammer are finally found in the innermost of a series of boxes, intact and tied with roses.

If Dante is the heir to this trick, he is also the heir and successor to nearly all of the better illusionists who have practiced their arts since the days of Cagliostro. Nearly all of his most puzzling tricks have been seen, perhaps in cruder form, on the magic stages of bygone days. But seldom have they been performed better, with more grace or with more geniality.

Of course the Dante show is full of hokum. By the same token it is corny and perhaps beneath the notice of the sophisticates, but what business have sophisticates, at a magic show anyway? Magic is for those whose child-like capacity for astonishment and curiosity has not been destroyed by the solemn and unhappy realism of the world today.

Dante's illusions are, for the most part, concerned with the disappearance of young women from a box and their reappearance elsewhere. His most spectacular is the transfer of one such beautiful maid from a cage on the stage to a box suspended from the ceiling, but the one which I simply do not believe happened at all is the trick in which the same girl is "broadcast" from one station to another in full view of the audience. That, certainly, is no parlor magic.

Dante varies his program by the customary feats of sleight of hand. His legerdemain is adept but rather lacking in novelty, and I imagine he uses it mainly as a stopgap to fill the intervals where the stage is being prepared for his heavier illusions. Among these tricks are that of the rope that is cut in pieces and reassembled, and the solid metal hoops that become linked together. These can be bought in almost any magic store, although I never knew but one amateur who could work them after he bought them.

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But there is another still has me guessing. Dante straps together two pieces of transparent glass with rubber tape, fires a revolver, and presently there appears between the two sheets the playing card that some obliging member of the audience has called for. There, gentlemen, is a trick!

There are two reasons why I shall not disclose how Dante does all these puzzling things. First, it would not be fair. Second, I do not know. But the wonderment, the guessing and the theories one evolves during a show of this kind are half the fun. The audience—and I—had a wonderful time.

'SIM SALA BIM'

SIM SALA BIM, a mystery spectacle in two parts. A company of thirty-five is headed by Dante (Harry A. Jansen), Danish-American magician, and Moi Yo Miller. The program includes transformations, comedy, magic, novelty, illusions, skill, quick changes and transfigurations. At the Morosco Theatre.

(Editor's Note: Although "Sim Sala Bim" is a magic revue, CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS is reprinting on this and the following page four of the reviews as given in the New York newspapers.)